

On 10/29/03 1:24 PM, "konrad" <konrad@PANIX.COM> wrote:

> On Tue, 28 Oct 2003, William C. Wees wrote:

>> They are documents savored and deconstructed at the same time, thanks to
>> the labors of archivist-connoisseur-social critic-artist Ken Jacobs.

>>

>> Star Spangled to Death might be considered the only truly avant-garde work
>> in „Views“ if you accept Peter Bürger's argument that the avant-garde is
>> defined by its opposition to the institution of art and, consequently, the
>> avant-garde artist does not produce „art works“ but art „manifestations.“
>> But that's too big a topic to get into here.

>

> Oh why not? Since Burger said that the neo avant garde is false, since the
> rebellion was lost with the first wave (dada and surrealists), it's not
> clear how it applies to a-g film. His book is totally facscinating and yet
> a little too totalizing, since he really doesn't deal with film properly at
> all, as one of multiple institutions of Art. So in fact i think you are
> right on with that call about Jacobs, since his work is so unpackagable
> and, in a word, obstreperous, at the same time that it's critical and
> fascinating and lush. It's like he has one foot inside the canon and one
> outside it, a split Duchamp could appreciate.

>

>

>

> [snip]

>> or two earlier Brakhage films to each of the short-film programs. Along
>> with the previously-scheduled recent films, these additions reminded us of
>> Brakage's mastery of the art of cinema (and, I felt, subtly suggested that
>> many younger filmmakers, including some included in „Views“, have been
>> influenced by Brakhage, whether they know it or not).

>

> One might say that viewers are also 'influenced' to see work as "like
> Brakhage." I hope the revelation of influence wasn't the only reason to
> juxtapose certain films. The word "influence" itself glosses and hides so
> much, because there are as many influences from one work as there are
> people influenced by it, so what's to generalize?

>

>

> then Mark replied " I was not trying to make a statement about influence as
> much as affinity -I did not want to isolate these films. The films were
> chosen specifically in relation to the other films on the announced
> programs and for their brevity and relevance. That is all I wish to say
> about it."

>

> Thank you for that word "affinity" Mark -- perfect.

>

> We saw the films of a Swiss filmmaker Hannes Schupbach (whom Courtney
wrote

> about on Frameworks from last year's "Views" show) in Berkeley last night.

> There were strong affinities between his lovely silent montages and
> filmmakers like Beavers, Brakhage, Baillie and Dorsky. Does that make him
> "influenced?"

>

> While speaking to Scott Stark the other day we were both talking about how

> Ernie Gehr's work means so much to us, and to us it seemed most appropriate
> to say that his work *gives us a kind of permission* to do something we
> already want to do. That's not quite influence, and it doesn't make our
> work derivative, but it does make some films a kind of response to his,
> just as i imagine some of the films in the "Views" programs are in
> response to other work, often multiple works.
>
> [snip]
>> On the other hand, some of the footage in the Jonas Mekas program should
>> have stayed in the can and on the shelf: „out-of-focus home movies,%o I
>> thought to myself. Whereas, other films in the program were exquisite,
>> vintage Mekas. Show the best^forget the rest..
>>
>
> That could also be an anti-institutional impulse, a kind of life force, if
> you will, which strikes me as kind of interesting (okay, okay: from a
> distance) coming from the man who institutionalized avant garde film as
> much as anyone, in a show that represents the institutionalization
> of the avant garde. But i don't know: a gesture can be succesful on one
> level and completely fail at several others.
>
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> konrad
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>On 10/29/03 4:23 PM, "David Westling" <dwestling@SBCGLOBAL.NET> wrote:

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>>> in „Views%o^if you accept Peter Bürger,s argument that the avant-garde is
>>> defined by its opposition to the institution of art and, consequently, the
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>> Oh why not? Since Burger said that the neo avant garde is false, since the
>> rebellion was lost with the first wave (dada and surrealists), it's not
>> clear how it applies to a-g film. His book is totally facscinating and yet
>> a little too totalizing, since he really doesn't deal with film properly at
>> all, as one of multiple institutions of Art. So in fact i think you are
>> right on with that call about Jacobs, since his work is so unpackagable
>> and, in a word, obstreperous, at the same time that it's critical and
>> fascinating and lush. It's like he has one foot inside the canon and one
>> outside it, a split Duchamp could appreciate.
>
> But isn't this reliance on such limiting definitions problematic in itself?
> We need not accept either of these two global statements, that the
> avant-garde is "defined by its opposition to the institution of art", and
> that "the rebellion was lost with the first wave". In the first place, we
> must inquire into the meaning of the phrase "institution of art" in the
> former example. As a reified, monolithic entity, the avant-garde indeed
> must provide an alternative. But Konrad said it well when he alluded to
> Duchamp's connection to the Great Tradition, which the (other) Surrealists
> also deigned to engage. I assure you, the rebellion has not yet been
> properly undertaken; there is a response to Camus, an extension to Breton, a
> clarifiacion of Duchamp that is waiting in the wings. Surrealism's great

> quandary, never able to really extricate itself from the quagmire of its
> Marxist and otherwise collectivist tendencies, betrayed a deep confusion
> about the nature of liberation. Does the individual's liberation presuppose
> a general liberation on the social level? From the point of view of radical
> nominalism, this question doesn't make sense, at least the last part of it.

>
> David Westling

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> On 10/29/03 6:44 PM, "konrad" <konrad@PANIX.COM> wrote:

> On Wed, 29 Oct 2003, David Westling wrote:

>
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>> avant-garde is "defined by its opposition to the institution of art", and
>> that "the rebellion was lost with the first wave". In the first place, we
>> must inquire into the meaning of the phrase "institution of art" in the
>> former example.

>
> I think in the first place one should read Buerger's book, The Theory of
> the Avant Garde. It's a lot more intelligently argued than you're giving
> credit for.

>
> The point about Jacobs' work is that, like the avant garde of those halcyon
> days around WW I, it appears to be trying to supercede the split between
> art and practical life, to make art matter again in real life, not just in
> the realm of artistic dialog (just say no to 'art for art's sake) and not
> just to do so by being engaged through ideology or identity politicking.

>
> I'm not going to argue for that in this case, because i didn't see the
> show, but hearing him lecture/teach, and seeing his screenings over the
> years, i feel like his work does try to wrestle with even it's being Art,
> inserting huge chunks of 'reality' (the whole "Checkers speech"?!) into the
> performance, making it sometimes ungainly, unmanagable and contrary, but
> something that you have to deal with anyway -- like life! At the same time
> it's respectful of the sensuous image, the flicker, and the experience of
> sight and time. It's critical, respectful, disdainful and sensual at the
> same time in its reworking of our image culture.

>
> I'd be really interested to hear other people's thoughts on any films in
> the 'Views' program -- don't feel like you have to review the whole show
> ...

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>
> konrad

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> ^Z

On 11/3/03 9:08 AM, "Roger Beebe" <rogerbb@ENGLISH.UFL.EDU> wrote:

> I've got a question about the recent musings (largely by Konrad)
> about Jacobs & his connection to the project of the historical avant
> garde as spelled out by Burger. What I'm specifically wondering is
> about the question of the institutions of the avant garde. When

> Konrad suggests that Jacobs may be attempting a reconciliation of the
> Art World and everyday life by incorporating huge unedited chunks of
> TV & such in his work, it strikes me that we're talking merely at the
> level of form (or content if we understand form and content as
> separable entities); what Jacobs doesn't seem to be doing (or at
> least what we haven't been talking about if he is doing it) is
> challenging the institutionalization of the avant garde at precisely
> such events as Views from the Avant Garde. So even at the formal
> level, he may be attempting a rapprochement of the Art World and
> everyday life, but only WITHIN the Art World. That is, I thought
> Burger's gloss on dada/surrealism was that there was an attempt to
> integrate art (back) into everyday life whereas all that the Jacobs
> seems to be doing--and admittedly I haven't seen it, so I'm relying
> on the discussion here--is integrating everyday life into art. Those
> seem to me to be substantially different projects, and the latter
> seems to me somewhat less radical than the former (in its acceptance
> of the Art World as the primary locus of intervention). In this
> light, I guess I'd be more inclined to say that the recent touring
> shows by folks like Bill Brown, Tom Comeford, Vanessa Renwick, Matt
> McCormick, et al. do more to reintegrate art into the everyday than
> does showing a work that contains hours of taped TV at the Walter
> Reade. I certainly don't mean to discount what the Jacobs piece
> appears to be doing or what Views from the Avant Garde represents,
> but I did want to point to this other set of institutional questions.
> And I do mean it to be a question--I'm very curious to hear others'
> thoughts on this.

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> ...
> Roger

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> p.s. For the record, I'm omitting the umlaut in Burger's name & have
> decided against the "Buerger" spelling preferred by Konrad. I'm sure
> it's more phonetically appropriate, but it looks strange to me.

>
>
On 11/3/03 8:48 PM, "Sam Wells" <samw@VOICENET.COM> wrote:

> Views from the Avant-Garde may be the "Institutional Avant-Garde"
> (although I almost have a hard time saying that in sobriety,
> I mean, what, the screen is big and the seats are very comfortable, so
> this is what Institutional is like, huh; wait'll the folks back in
> Peoria here about this !) but -- is it really the Art World (TM) ??

>
> Secretly, I kind of wish it was some outpost of The Art World (TM)

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>> McCormick, et al. do more to reintegrate art into the everyday than
>> does showing a work that contains hours of taped TV at the Walter
>> Reade.

>

> I'm not familiar with those shows, so, how do they do this ?

>

> -Sam (Patent Pending)

>

On 11/4/03 12:00 PM, "konrad" <konrad@PANIX.COM> wrote:

>> Jacobs may be attempting a reconciliation of the Art World and

>> everyday life by incorporating huge unedited chunks of TV &

>

> Maybe reconciliation isn't the right word. The 'historic avant

> garde' -- meaning the dadists, surrealists, and i believe

> analytic cubism and perhaps some of the futurists were reacting

> to the development of a realm of culture reserved for artistic

> dialog, in a word: aestheticism. This is my gloss on Booger's

> Theory ... book. It means attacking the institution, but the

> institution absorbed the attack with the counter move of

> appropriation. Bill Wees said he thought Jacobs' work was in

> that tradition of the avant garde. One can attack the

> institution, from within, just as Fountain was submitted to a

> 'new art' exhibition by a member of the committee

> (clandestinely).

>

> I think the gesture of including an enormously long show, with a

> whole speech by Nixon in it, is not too far from questioning what

> can be a film. As Fountain demanded: what can be a sculpture?

> I.e. what is the credential that you have to have to get into the

> exhibition. Credentials come into being at the same time as the

> institutions that issue them. So it seems like using that forum

> is a reasonable way to leverage your critique, to use the

> institution against itself, to sabotage it.

>

> However on further reflection, it seems that the critical aspect

> of Duchamp's gesture was to do it on the sly, where as in Jacobs'

> case, he *has* credentials already, so they get him in the door.

>

> Still, there is something so aggressively non-commercial about a

> lot of his work that it can't engage the financial structure that

> keeps the institution in place, and like Sam said, the avant

> garde film world is hardly a rock of an institution that the

> studio-gallery-collector-museum world is.

>

> I would ask a similar question of your examples though. Those

> touring shows, while they are bringing Art to the People, which

> might appear to be a reconciliation, still risk begging the

> question, by creating a kind of alternative gig circuit. What

> are their aspirations for that kind of presentation? Is it

> really doing something about the institution or just extending

> its reach?

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> konrad

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On 11/7/03 1:33 PM, "Roger Beebe" <rogerbb@ENGLISH.UFL.EDU> wrote:

> I agree with both Sam & Konrad that we're clearly not talking about
> prized commodities being unfurled at Views from the Avant Garde (even
> art world commodities a la Matthew Barney), so the (TM) in my original
> post was probably excessive. That said, I think it's a mistake to
> conflate institutionalization with commodification. I'm not really
> convinced that the main problem that the historical avant gardes were
> reacting against was commodification; my sense is that problem becomes
> the central dilemma later. For the historical avant garde, isn't the
> main problem in fact the ossification of art as institution (i.e.,
> institutionalization in a more strict and literal sense)? Historically
> this takes the form of aestheticism, as Konrad following Burger
> suggests, which is nothing more than the development of an autonomous
> institution that forever seeks to separate art from everyday life. And
> this is where I think that Jacobs/Views doesn't quite live up to the
> claims that Konrad offered in his first email. The people who head to
> Views know to some extent what they're going to get--Art. Does
> encountering some large chunks of the everyday undermine that? I'd
> argue that it doesn't (at least not radically so) when marked with the
> double signature of Jacobs (institutional/canonical avant gardist) and
> Views (renowned institution of the avant garde).

>

> I wanted to respond also to the questions about the traveling film
> shows by Bill Brown, et al., but I'm having difficulty formulating a
> good general answer. Basically, my sense is that these shows are
> programmed in a real variety places, some mini-art institutions
> (galleries like Heaven in Chicago), some really not art institutions at
> all (bars, rock clubs, people's homes, warehouses), and some with a
> liminal status between the two (microcinemas). The first of these may
> only represent an inter-institutional battle to determine which art
> counts, who gets to say what counts, etc. without displacing the
> institution of art in any significant way. I guess I'm more hopeful
> about the other end of the spectrum, although I'm sure when these shows
> are advertised, they do mention, for example, Bill's Rockefeller grant,
> so they do draw on the cultural capital of their prior endorsement by
> the institutions. The more I write, the more pessimistic I'm feeling
> about all of it, so maybe I'll stop.

>

> I am wondering though, about the strict terms of Burger's book, where
> the destruction of art as institution happens through interventions
> within the art world rather than within the fabric of everyday
> life--was this a limitation built into the project of the historical
> avant gardes? And does circumventing these institutions (if possible)
> represent another possible project that hasn't yet been exhausted?
> Whether or not all circumventions finally result in the establishment
> of new institutions & the circumventers themselves inevitably become
> emissaries of art as institution (as Konrad suggests), I'm not finally
> able to say.

>

> For what it's worth,

> RB

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> On Monday, November 3, 2003, at 11:48 PM, Sam Wells wrote:

>

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>> (although I almost have a hard time saying that in sobriety,
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On 11/8/03 9:06 AM, "konrad" <konrad@PANIX.COM> wrote:

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>> encountering some large chunks of the everyday undermine that? I'd
>> argue that it doesn't (at least not radically so) when marked with the
>> double signature of Jacobs (institutional/canonical avant gardist) and
>> Views (renowned institution of the avant garde).

>

> I think it's possible to identify the institution (a system)
> with its representations (buildings, occasions, people). If you
> do that, then you paralyze anyone associated with the
> institution, taking away from them any independence, any ability
> to act against the institution's interests. Granted that the way
> the institution self-perpetuates is to get people to align
> self-interest with institutional survival, but that doesn't mean
> it's always successful propagating that myth.

>

> Seeing as how i wasn't at the show, and i'm backing up what
> someone else said, i shouldn't even be replying, except to
> clarify that i simply appreciate the characterization Wees gave
> the film, in relation to all the other films on the program. It
> makes me see the description in a light that distinguished it
> from the descriptions of those others, and i understood the
> gesture (as described) in some continuity with what i know of
> Jacobs' work and spirit, and while i concede that he's not going
> to "overthrow the institution," (and i doubt that is his
> expressed intent) i do firmly believe he is in the tradition of
> artists who want their work to engage actively with how we
> understand and act through our political, ethical, social,
> sexual, etc etc selves -- to effect the whole shabang, so to

> speak. What happened around 1916 was people realized that art,
> in gaining independence and freedom to explore form and
> perception, had traded away efficacy and relevance to much of
> life, had made a separate peace.
>
> Here's an entry from Hugo Ball's journal, 5.IV.1916:
> "We discuss the theories of art of the last few decades, always
> with reference to the questionable nature of art itself, its
> complete anarchy, its relationship with the public, race, and
> contemporary culture. It can probably be said that for us art is
> not an end in itself -- more pure naivete is necessary for that
> -- but it is an opportunity for true perception and criticism of
> the times we live in, both of which are essential for an
> unstriking but characteristic style. The latter does not seem to
> us such a simple matter as one is often inclined to think. What
> can a beautiful, harmonious poem say if nobody reads it because
> it has nothing to do with the feelings of the times? And what
> can a novel have to say when it is read for culture but is really
> a long way from even touching on culture?" [Ball is the guy who
> started Cabaret Voltaire in Zurich where dada came from.]
>
> A lot has happened since those questions first came up. The
> 'institution' learned to cope, but the problem seems still there
> because that very coping co-opts so many attempts to use art to
> change life. Sure, Jacobs' work is not 'underground' but it is
> in the tradition of trying to make stuff that is both
> artistically and politically assertive, to be "true perception
> and criticism." Another danger, besides being co-opted, is
> getting so cynical that genuine efforts appear only self-serving,
> if they are not totally successful. Of course they never are.
>
> I guess a better question (for all of us who can't argue from the
> *work* in question) is what is the point of an avant garde today?
> -- since we seem to think we have one -- and does it really
> function, or is it busy aestheticising itself?
>
> Or: if you show your shorts in a bar, does that make them avant garde?
>
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> konrad
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> ^Z
>